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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIRUT 000193

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/19/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: DEFMIN ON DEMONSTRATIONS, QATAR/UNIFIL  
AND AMR MOUSSA

REF: 07 BEIRUT 1864

BEIRUT 00000193 001.2 OF 004

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

SMMARY

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11. (C) In a February 8th introductory meeting at the MinDef's home, MinDef Elias Murr warmly welcomed the Ambassador and laid the ground work for continued, close coordination and cooperation with the USG. Murr looks forward to the upcoming visit of USDP Edelman and what that entails for supporting the Army. Murr outlined his strategic vision for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), his views on the demonstrations of 1/27, and what this means for the LAF. Murr was pessimistic about the prospects for the ongoing Amr Moussa visit and predicted and increase in Sunni-Shia tensions in the coming weeks. While concerned about short term, Murr is optimistic that things will be fine in the medium to long term. The recent departure of Qatar from the UNIFIL mandate is an issue of concern as other countries will be more apt to leave the mission. Murr recommended asking Turkey, Jordan and Egypt for troops. Murr closed the meeting stressing his confidence in USG support for Lebanon no matter who is in power in Washington.

12. (C) Ambassador, DCM and Defense Attache met with Lebanese Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Elias Murr at his home in Rabieh. The atmosphere of the meeting was upbeat and cordial.

LOOKING FORWARD TO USDP VISIT  
WANT TO MOVE STRATEGIC VISION FORWARD, SLOWLY  
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13. (C) Murr told us that he is happy to see USDP Edelman come back to Lebanon as it shows continued support for the government during these difficult times. At the same time, Murr reminded us that the situation in Lebanon is much different than the last time USDP Edelman was here, specifically citing the dangers of assassination and the increased tension on the street between the Sunnis and the Shias.

14. (C) The MinDef told us that he looks forward to continuing the discussion on the Bilateral Defense Committee (BDC) that he discussed with MinDef Murr in October (Reftel). Murr feels that informal discussions on this topic should continue to outline the general contours of what the BDC would hope to accomplish. In any event, no formal announcement of the BDC should be made before the new Lebanese President is elected. (Comment: These comments surely refer to the negative statements in the opposition press after the USDP's last visit where USDP Edelman was accused of trying to change the LAF doctrine. Changing the LAF doctrine requires a Cabinet decision and not action can be taken unilaterally by the MinDef on this topic.)

15. (C) Murr did expound on his strategic vision for the Army that he voiced in Reftel. His strategic plan has four parts, all drawing on the Martz report as its foundation: 1) Training - a comprehensive training program for the Army is needed now; 2) Train and equip ten Special Forces Brigades for Counter-Terrorism (CT) missions; 3) Acquire sufficient troop transport helicopters to move these CT troops to the fight; 4) Acquire an attack helicopter to provide close air support to these CT troops in combat.

NOTHING WILL HAPPEN WITH MOUSSA VISIT  
THE FRENCH STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING  
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16. (C) Amr Moussa will meet with Abou Elias, MinDef Murr's father Michel Murr, during his current mission to Lebanon. The MinDef has extremely low expectations for his mission saying, "nothing will happen." Murr feels that the current stalemate is related to the larger regional conflagration between Saudi Arabia and Syria. Murr said that Bashar Al-Asad is a liar and continues to lie to the Arab League about his policies and intentions in Lebanon.

BEIRUT 00000193 002.2 OF 004

17. (C) This manner of lying is not just limited to the Arab League. Murr thinks that Bashar effectively duped the French President Sarkozy. While the French may have learned from this event, Murr still thinks they are following a bizarre policy in Lebanon. In any case, Murr feels that Sarkozy is convinced that Syria supports terrorism and Iran. (Comment: Murr and Sarkozy are old friends and call upon one another. Murr and Sarkozy were Ministers of Interior at the same time from 2000-2004, exchanged regular visits and cooperated extensively on security matters. End Comment.) According to Murr, the only country that understand that Syria is a liar is the United States.

18. (C) In any case, Murr does not believe that the Syrians will give up their demands for a blocking third of Cabinet seats as a part of a package deal that installs LAF General Michel Sleiman as President. Additionally, the Syrians will not abandon their demands for "agreement" over ever single security portfolio in the a new Cabinet. According to Murr, "they want their signature on every person who takes a position." Abandonment of the International Tribunal for the murder of former PM Rafic Harriri is also included in the Syrian list of demands that are non-negotiable. Murr told us that the tribunal is part of the Amr Moussa package, but that this is not being advertised.

SECTARIAN TENSION IN THE STREETS  
THE LAF WILL MAINTAIN ORDER  
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19. (C) Murr told us that the tension in the streets between the Sunnis and the Shias is reaching dangerous levels. Saad Hariri's calls for demonstrations on 2/14 and his aggressive language towards Hizbullah during a 2/7 interview will only serve to stoke these sectarian tensions. Murr thinks it will be difficult for Saad to bring pressure against Hizbullah because the of their "resistance" moniker, but that this

needs to happen. If Hizbullah is brought out into the street, the world will see that Hizbullah is not a "resistance." Instead, everyone will see that they are an Iranian and Syrian group that is working against the best interests of Lebanon. If a clash does occur between the Sunnis and Shias, it will be bloody, but it will also be short.

¶10. (C) Murr does not think this a scenario that will lead to a civil war, but there will be problems in the street. Any clash in the street will pressure the LAF to intervene and "neutralize" the situation. The morale of the Army is good and the Army will do its job. While the demonstrations, and subsequent deaths of at least seven demonstrators at the hands of the LAF, have caused tensions, Murr does not think these tensions will last. Instead, Murr thinks that the unity of the Army is very strong and he is not worried about the Shia officers in the Army breaking ranks.

THE AOUN-HIZBULLAH ALLIANCE  
EVIDENCE OF WAVERING SUPPORT  
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¶11. (C) One of the more important movements among LAF Officers is their increasing concern over the Aoun-Hizbullah alliance. In some circles, this alliance is being openly questioned by pro-Aoun officers. The catalyst for this change in support was the arrest of three pro-Aoun officers in the LAF after the demonstrations on 1/27. Officers are now asking, "This is the meaning of the accord with Hizbullah? Now we are the ones in jail!?"

¶12. (C) Murr explained that there is "real Christian madness in the street" because of this situation. Murr told us that this discord among the Aounies was the reason for the joint appearance of Aoun and Hizbullah SYG Hassan Nasrallah on television on 2/6. The joint appearance on "OTV", Aoun's television channel, was meant to bolster support for the alliance. From our vantage point, it seems to have been a flat performance that has not garnered much support among the Christians.

THIS IS THE MOST DANGEROUS TIME  
THE NEXT TWO WEEKS ARE VERY IMPORTANT

BEIRUT 00000193 003.2 OF 004

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¶13. (C) Murr told us that the string of assassinations will continue unabated. Indeed Murr invited the Ambassador the club of high profile individuals that are being targeted. Murr stressed that the Lebanese security services can increase the security profile, but they cannot defend against a suicide attack. Telling us that the next two weeks would be especially dangerous, Murr said that we needed to develop a contingency plan to deal with these "very turbulent times."

¶14. (C) After painting a relatively bleak picture in a Beirut context, Murr also told us that he thinks this condition is transitory. While he is not optimistic in the short term, he is optimistic over the medium and long term. "I know my Army team. We have done a good job and we have credibility inside and outside the country. No one can destroy the Army. We will get past this crisis."

NEXT STEPS FORWARD  
THE FIGHT FOR THE PALESTINIAN CAMPS  
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¶14. (C) Murr told us the Al Qaeda presence and strength inside the Ain Al Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp is on the rise and becoming ever more dangerous. The presence of other Sunni terrorists also remains a problem. Murr opined that Lebanon is the only place in the world where Shia are funding Sunni terrorists. Murr explained that Hizbullah funds the Palestinian terrorists so that Hizbullah's fingerprints are not on the terrorist acts. Meanwhile, everyone knows they are

behind these activities.

Murr also told us that the PFLP-GC camp in Na'ame is also becoming a much larger threat.

¶15. (C) Murr told us that there are only two options for Lebanon. "We must win, or we must win. There is n other option." If Lebanon loses to the terrorits, Lebanon will cease to exist as a state. Indeed, Murr thinks that Lebanon would become a failed state along the lines of Afghanistan when the Taliban were in charge. A stern Murr told us, "we cannot accept them to be in control. My job is to back you and to support you."

GARNERING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT  
WORK ON THE SAUDI, EGYPT AND JORDAN  
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¶16. (C) When asked how the international community could help Lebanon, Murr was quick to respond. Murr told us that the Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan could be easily pushed into helping. In fact, Murr asked us to consider this as the best model, i.e. working through regional surrogates. In Murr's estimation, the US strategy of working through regional actors to confront Iran and Syria in Lebanon is the most effective strategy the US is pursuing in the region.

MAINTAINING SUPPORT FOR UNIFIL  
THE GAP LEFT BY THE SYRIAN AND IRANIAN PROXY: QATAR  
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¶17. (C) With recent departure of Qatar from the UNIFIL Contingent in south Lebanon, Murr fears that other countries will view this as a green light to leave as well. The eastern European countries in UNIFIL came at the behest of the EU and in the attempt to sell weapons to the LAF. This has not, and will not, happen according to Murr. The other European contingents are constrained by the domestic politics of their countries and are extremely risk averse to even a single casualty.

¶18. (C) Murr did not hide his contempt for the Qataris whom he sees as bad actors in general, and especially with their departure at this time. "It smells bad that they leave during this period. The Emir in Qatar made this decision." Murr told us that the Qatari Armed Forces Chief of Staff had come to see him to explain Qatar's withdrawal from UNIFIL. Forgetting that he was talking to the Lebanese Minister of Defense, the Qatar Chief of Staff explained the rationale for leaving saying, "Our commitment to Syria and Hizbullah was

BEIRUT 00000193 004.2 OF 004

only for one year." Realizing that he had grossly erred in saying this to Murr, the meeting quickly ended.

¶19. (C) Asked who should be called upon to reinforce UNIFIL, Murr had several recommendations. While the Turks are already in the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force, Murr strongly urged us to seek Turkish troops because, "the Syrian are fearful of the Turks." Second, Murr told us that we should seeks troop contributions from the Egyptians and the Jordanians. To get their participation, he told us that Egypt nd Jordan would need, "a little push."

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